

"Music For Silent Films, 1894-1929: A Guide, S/N 030-000-00199-1"

BY DR EDWARD J. MULLINS

This new book was compiled in 1988 with an introduction by Gillian B. Anderson, music specialist, Music Division of The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The Introduction, pages xiii to xl (13 to 69) gives a short history of the development of the accompaniment of silent motion pictures from nickelodeon pianists to the deluxe presentation houses with their giant theatre pipe organs and full orchestras.

There are two photographs of the New York Roxy Theatre (6,214 seats). One shows Mr. S. L. ("Roxy") Rothafel with the five-manual Roxy Kimball console. The other shows the orchestra, under the direction of Hugo Riesenfeld, on the lift in concert position. The three organ consoles being visible. The orchestra often played four concerts a day.

The section on Theatre Organs and Organists mentions that in 1929 Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Crawford commanded \$500 to \$1,000 a week at the New York Paramount Theatre. They also reprint a portion of Canadian member Clealan Blakely's preface to member Dr. John W. Landon's definitive 1974 book, "Jesse Crawford Poet of the Organ, Wizard of the Mighty Wurlitzer."

Accompaniment of Pictures

"Organists like Iris Vining (San Francisco) improvised an accompaniment to each picture; others like Jesse Crawford played original scores or scores compiled from popular songs, dance tunes, and the light and serious classics." (page xxi) There are 113 references, several of these have been published in previous issues of THE POET.

The "Failing of Films and Accompanists" section is very caustic, but

has a rebuttal from theatre organist Lloyd G. del Castillo, from a 1927 issue of American Organist, about some of the conditions and managers that the organists had to endure. "Cue Sheets" gives some of the drawbacks and advantages of having a cue sheet. "Original Scores" discusses "The Birth of a Nation" (1914) at length. "Way Down East" (1920) and "The Thief of Bagdad" are also analyzed.

The Guide is essentially a catalog of The Library of Congress' music for 1,047 silent films. There are many still photographs from many of the classic silents, sheet music covers, pages from cue sheets and scores, production shots, etc.

If you are a serious student or collector of silent film music I then would recommend this book. There is a lot of "padding," e.g. blank pages, wide borders and margins, etc., but it is interesting as a reference book. There are no scores or complete cue sheets. Price \$27.00:

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1989

CUE SHEET ISSUE

Jesse Crawford Chapter
American Theatre Organ Soc.
3115 Second Avenue North
Billings, Montana 59101 USA



JESSE CRAWFORD
Theatre Organ Society

'Metropolis' didn't light up life

The nearly \$4 million London musical "Metropolis," the first stage show by American film and TV commercial composer Joe Brooks, will close Sept. 2 at a loss, its producers said Monday.

Adapted from the 1926 Fritz Lang film, the show opened to poor reviews March 8 at the Piccadilly Theater, with critics praising only Ralph Koltai's massive, pipe-filled sets.

Composer and co-lyricist Brooks is best known for his Oscar-winning song "You Light Up My Life."

Brian Blessed, the original Old Deuteronomy from "Cats," and Judy Kuhn, a Broadway veteran of "Chess" and "Les Miserables," were the original stars, although Kuhn has since been replaced by Mary Lincoln.

Tuesday, August 22, 1989

"METROPOLIS" was the 1988 Cue Sheet. New Members who wish to purchase this back issue of THE POET may do so for \$2.50 which includes postage.

"METROPOLIS IS COLOSSAL.!"

Time Magazine

"METROPOLIS . . . is a mega musical. Everything about it is big: Big cast, big sets, big ideas. The whole thing has a majestic naivety which the musical brilliantly preserves."

Sunday Times

"METROPOLIS . . . is the apotheosis of the scenic musical. It is simply exciting . . . an engrossing and gargantuan spectacle. I found myself bowled along by the story and boggling at the scenery . . ."

Guardian

"THE WONDERFUL JUDY KUHN . . . ALL THE PASSION AND PATHOS OF A YOUNG JUDY GARLAND"

City Limits

"BREATHTAKING"

The Times

"ROUSING AND SPELLBINDING"

Time

"METROPOLIS MAKES IT TO A STANDING OVATION"

Daily Telegraph

METROPOLIS

"THE BRILLIANT BRIAN BLESSED"

Time Out

"STAGGERING"

BBC Radio

"A LAVISH NEW MUSICAL BASED ON FRITZ LANG'S 1927 FILM METROPOLIS IS A ROUSING EVEN SPELLBINDING ADDITION TO THE WEST END'S CURRENT OFFERINGS"

Time

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FOR

JESSE CRAWFORD
THEATRE ORGAN SOCIETY
MEMBERS ONLY

The POET Journal of the
Jesse Crawford Chapter
American Theatre Organ Soc

"C O L L E G E"

This Cue Sheet edition features Buster Keaton's eighth feature comedy, "College" (6 reels). "College" was made in the Spring of 1927, between "The General" and "Steamboat Bill, Jr." and was released August 9, 1927 by United Artists.

Joseph Frank Keaton was born on October 4, 1895 in a Piqua, Kansas boardinghouse. His parents, Joseph Hallie Keaton and Myra Edith Cutler, were vaudevillians. When he was six months old he fell down a boardinghouse stairs. Escape artist Harry Houdini saw him fall and said, "That's some buster your baby took!" Father Joe said, "Well, Buster, looks like Uncle Harry has named you!" This was five years before the first appearance of the Buster Brown cartoons.

Buster spent his boyhood with his parents' tent-show act being bounced around the stage with bone-crushing regularity. His famous dead-pan look originated in vaudeville when the act called for him to pester his father to death, but it wasn't funny to the audience when he smiled. He developed the physical grace and dexterity he was noted for during all those early years when he was used as a prop.

Fatty Arbuckle introduced Buster to the movies in 1917. Two years later Keaton was making and starring in his own two-reelers, gathering fame for his on-screen stunts and stone face. By the time he was 33, the greatest years of his career were over.

Divorce and alcoholism, bankruptcy and obscurity followed. A third and lasting marriage to his widow Eleanor eased his private life. Buster Keaton died February 1, 1966 in Woodland Hills, California. When he was buried he had a rosary in one pocket and a deck of cards in the other, ready for magic in another life.

Due to a dispute with another ATOS Chapter the Special Features of THE POET will now be sent to Members Only. There will be no exceptions to this rule. Please note that the "College" Cue Sheet bears this red stamp. We request that members please not make copies. If someone want a copy, let them join and pay dues to receive it.

The Photoplay Organist and Pianist

By Lloyd G. del Castillo

A Vacation Tour of Theatre Organs in New York

ARE you familiar with the classic of the sailor who, granted shore leave, was discovered propelling a row-boat around the pond in the Boston Public Gardens?

I, too, was born in Matteawan. Having been granted a two weeks' respite from the burdens of this life, I spent it rushing from one place to another through a misguided ambition to hear all the good theatre organs and organists in New York State. That I did not entirely succeed was in some measure due to natural and artificial agencies outside my control—as, for instance, my late afternoon spurt from Rochester to Buffalo, only to find that while en route the clocks had been turned forward an hour and 8:30 in Rochester was 9:30 in Buffalo, so that by the time I got used to the little red, yellow and green traffic lights perched out of sight above my windshield visor, the evening in Buffalo was ruined. What little sleuthing I did accomplish was not encouraging.

The Hippodrome and the Lafayette are both typical vaudeville houses, than which there is none "whicher," so far as an expectation of an elevated standard of music goes. Vaudeville audiences just won't stand for it, that's all.

EASTMAN THEATRE THE "LAST WORD"

But anything would have been a disappointment after my visit to the Eastman Theatre in Rochester. It is sufficient comment to make that the Capitol in New York seems almost tawdry by comparison. For the many to whom the Capitol is the Mecca and Taj Mahal of photoplay theatredom, such a statement seems like wild and loose talk and a rabid violation of the right of free speech, but to me the appointments of the Eastman are unquestionably superior. To begin with, the Capitol, although a comparatively new theatre, is decorated in the old school of gilded and satin luxuriousness, whereas the Eastman is developed on the simpler key-note of ascetic dignity, in which walls of enormous stone blocks are set off only by tapestries and neutral hangings. The latter house, therefore, although having a much smaller seating capacity, being a mere toy of approximately four thousand seats, gives the effect of much greater spaciousness and vastness; not only that, but the appointments generally are superior—lounges, foyer, decorations, uniforms, all showing the most painstaking attention to perfection of detail. What I was naturally most interested in, however, was the organ. Here there is no comparison. The Capitol organ, smooth-voiced and satisfactory as it is, dwindles into insignificance beside the Eastman organ, which is credited with being the world's largest theatre organ.

THE EASTMAN THEATRE ORGAN

To those readers interested in organ design a brief résumé should be enlightening. We have here in essence a six-manual organ, the Solo and Echo being played from the fourth top manual, and the Orchestral being ancillary—that is, playable on any manual. There is also a complete ancillary String organ, but in its case the stops themselves appear on each manual as part of that manual's equipment. The organ was designed by Harold Gleason, Mr. Eastman's private organist and head of the organ department of the Eastman School of Music, and built by the Austin Company. It is therefore a tribute to the designer's broad-mindedness to discover that, in addition to being a splendid concert instrument, the organ has been equipped with all the traps essential for theatre work. The 42-stop pedal is largely borrowed, and the Orchestral is mostly duplexed from the Solo, but the

remainder of the organ is entirely independent. The entire organ is enclosed, save for the Great Diapasons and Tibia Plena.

There are 23 pipe stops on the Great, 25 on the Swell, 19 on the Choir, 20 on the Solo, 10 on the Echo, and 26 on the Orchestral. The strings, while abundant, seemed to me a trifle thin. Flutes and Diapasons are rich and full, and a particularly valuable feature is the profusion of mutation ranks. On the Great alone we find a Quint, Twelfth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Septieme, Twenty-Second, and a three-rank Mixture. The Reeds, one of the most valuable departments of the theatre organ, although unfortunately often stressed at the expense of Flutes and Diapasons, are plentiful and varied. On the Orchestral, which is naturally richest in reeds, we find a French Horn, Basset Horn, Clarinet, Bassoon, English Horn, Orchestral Oboe, Oriental Reed, Vox Humana, and Musette. If that riot of color doesn't make your mouth water it stamps you as a stony-hearted, soulless pianist playing at an organ you have no business to touch. And the traps—gosh all hemlock, the traps! Harp, Chimes, Bells, Xylophone, Piano, Sleigh-bells, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Cymbals, Crash Cymbal, Tambourine, Castanets, Triangle, Tom Tom, Woodblock, Bird Whistle, Fire Gong, Steamboat Whistle, Horse Hoofs, Auto Horn, Door Bell—everything but the Kitchen Stove. The position, in order to be filled properly, calls for a married organist with several small children.

Whether John Hammond, who was at the console when I was present, answers those qualifications, I do not know. If he doesn't, my logic is all wrong, for no one could have handled this Mastodon of Organs more smoothly than he. Unfortunately for the Eastman Theatre, he has by now left there to accept a position on Broadway, but Mr. Berentsen (his associate) and Mr. Smith (his successor) are both of sufficiently sound repute to carry on. Mr. Hammond's style is unusual and fascinating, notwithstanding that he violates one of my strictest rules—to improvise only for a definite purpose when no appropriate music can be found. Through the showing of Ingram's "The Arab" he improvised every second, with the exception of about ten minutes when he hospitably invited me to sit in and take a few whacks. His influence had been so insidious that I found myself doing the same thing, except for playing a little "Scheherezade."

However, I regard him as one of the exceptions that proves the rule. For the average organist, whose idea of improvisation is to play arpeggios and chromatic runs over a tonic, sub-dominant, dominant harmonic foundation, and for the hurries to let loose a wildly exotic succession of diminished sevenths, I still turn a deaf ear to piteous appeals to be allowed to ramble through a picture. In a recent article elsewhere, I summarized my objections to improvising so compactly that I feel constrained to plagiarise from myself for these pages, as follows:

First, most organists don't know how to improvise. Second, even when they do, they can't maintain their standard through a week of forty-two hours, more or less. Third, an audience prefers to hear familiar, or at least coherent pieces. Fourth, Wagner, Tchaikovski, MacDowell and the rest do these things so much better.

THE ESTEY LUMINOUS CONSOLE

In New York City my most pleasant experience was playing the Capitol Theatre organ in the morning before the

house opened. While this organ is adequate and smoothly voiced and also has four manuals, it cannot compare in size or equipment with the Eastman organ. The latter, as I explained above, is really a six-manual proposition. The Estey organ at the Capitol, on the other hand, is really only a three-manual instrument with one manual duplexed. The Strings and Flutes are admirable. The Reeds are the Haskell reedless type, whose chief recommendation, in my opinion, is the fact that they stay in tune. I have never played any which I thought could compare in pungency with the authentic reed. This, in all due respect to Mr. Haskell's remarkable achievement, which is a noteworthy step in organ design. As a theatre organ, the Capitol instrument is deficient in brilliancy. Not only is it handicapped by relatively scant Mutation and the lack of keenness in the Reeds, but by the limitation of Percussion to Chimes, Harp and Xylophone. In short, it is an adequate concert instrument, but not sufficiently varied in scope to fulfil all the manifold duties of a theatre organ.

My chief interest in it, however, was not so much in the organ itself as in the new Estey invention—the luminous stop-touch console. Of this I cannot speak too enthusiastically. In place of the conventional draw knobs, rocker tablets or tongues, we find little compact rows of push buttons above the top manual, very much like typewriter keys, except that there is a tiny lamp under the glass head which lights when the key is pushed. A second push disconnects the contact again. The name of the stop is inscribed in tiny letters on the glass head. As these little square sets of keys look very much like cash registers, it is odd that the first installation should have been for the organ built by Estey for the schoolhouse and auditorium of the National Cash Register Company at Dayton, Ohio, in January, 1923.

The advantages of these little Christmas tree dinguses are numerous. The most obvious is that in their compact lay-out above the top manual, they do away with all the awkward side motions that organists have had to train themselves to, from time immemorial. Hope Jones with his elliptical console made a tremendous step forward from the old draw knobs. The Estey Company has, I believe, made an even greater stride with the luminous button. In addition to this very evident convenience of accessibility, this lay-out also makes it possible to set a registration with practically one motion, as one plays a chord, the fingers falling on the buttons in the same way or perhaps in arpeggio form, and to cancel stops with the same identical motion that sets them. (I can readily imagine that the ability to play a typewriter or a cash register is going to prove the determining factor in selecting applicants for positions on these organs.)

I can even imagine that purely as a spectacular device, this console might be a successful selling point to the average theatre manager, for whose musical intelligence I have little respect. (This statement excludes, of course, all managers with whom I now have dealings, or any with whom I may have in the future.) For unlike all preceding types of console, the register crescendo acts visibly on the stop keys, and as it is opened and closed, a flashing pyrotechnic display results. This is fascinating to the layman, one of whom after seeing this organ during a performance asked me later what caused these lights to constantly flash while the organist's hands were observed to be confined to playing on the manuals. Please do not think me bitter if I add that there are many organists who have little more knowledge of the proper use of the register crescendo than many of the laymen who are obliged to listen to them.

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE BENEFIT OF PUFFED-UP THEATRE ORGANISTS

Ambition is a wonderful thing. Spurred on by motives that are not particularly clear to most of us, we drive our

minds and bodies through all sorts of exhausting contortions with the idea of accumulating wealth that we will have neither the time nor spirit to enjoy, or of forcing other egoists to accord us a grudging modicum of adulation, which is in most cases merely a vicarious method of congratulating themselves on their own intellectual powers of appreciation.

Now I am talking nonsense, but there is nevertheless just enough truth in it to serve as introduction for a few trenchant remarks on theatre organists. Professional performers of all kinds are notorious for having an acute realization of how fascinating they are, the most exaggerated example of which is the "vodvillian" with his wearisome tales of how he knocked 'em out of their seats.

The movie organist is not free from this disease, and it manifests itself in an odd way. With the peculiar complex of imagining that the audience behind him is listening to his dulcet sounds rather than watching the picture, I have time after time read illuminating accounts of how at some choice imitative or descriptive bit of fitting, he made the audience howl with laughter. It is really remarkable to me how easily the majority of otherwise reasonably sane organists have managed to delude themselves with this bit of hokum, when a little analysis would show them that in practically every case the music fitted a bit of humorous action at which the audience would have laughed anyway.

Occasionally there is, I admit, an exception in which the organist may interpolate some perfectly explosive effect that by mere dynamics will win a reaction from the audience, but as a rule, if the organist will have courage enough to omit his perfectly screaming effect on some performance, he will be forced to admit that his auditory seismograph will not show any marked variation. If any organist tells you he played "Where Did You Get That Hat" when the man appeared in the funny hat, and made the audience laugh and applaud, you may rest assured that the joke was not on the man or the audience, but on the organist.

It has always been my conviction that while excellent music will make a musical reputation for a house, it will not affect the patronage by five per cent. Of course five per cent of a normal week's business should run from \$150 up to seven or eight hundred, so it is not worth the desecration to make the music too rotten; but, in general, I am forced to conclude that people go to a picture show to see the pictures, and not to listen to the music. I can think of several cases where houses with good pictures and poor music have played to capacity, while competitors with good music and poor pictures starved, but none where the reverse is true. The trouble is that the musicians in a picture audience are in the great minority, and that even among those present is a considerable per cent who stop up their ears while watching the screen.

However, this does not mean that, other factors being fairly equal, the musical people will not be attracted to the theatre that has the best music. In other words, there will always be an important minority that it is the organist's duty and function to play to, while he hopes to catch the rest by his showmanship and brilliancy of execution on the comedies, cartoons and solo numbers.

A perusal of the names of the most advertised organists in the business will show that, with a very few conspicuous exceptions, this is precisely what the most famous men do. Murtagh and Crawford are sufficient proof that the surest road to fame is showmanship based on a sound musicianship. I believe that their names will be at the top of the list with others of the same class long after the flashy tricksters will have sunk far below the stellar horizon, and that the newcomers who are now on the way to join them are those conscientious musicians who are painstakingly learning the technique of the organ, composition, theory and musical history, and on that sound foundation building a characteristic individual style with an alert attention to theatrical values.

GEM THEATRE

Home of Big Pipe Organ



Steve Plaggemeyer at the Möller console of the 2/8 Kimball organ, First Church of Christ Scientist, Billings, Montana. The late Miss Myrna McNeill, who was a Scientist, was a theatre organist at many of the theatres in Billings and may have been instrumental in acquiring organ for church.

NAT. C. GOODWIN

AT May 25, 1913

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BILLINGS' FIRST PIPE ORGAN LOCATED

By Dr. Ed Mullins

The first pipe organ installed in Eastern Montana was a \$4,000 two-manual, 7 or 8-rank Kimball with tubular pneumatic action. It was installed in 1913 in the Gem Theatre located at 120 North 27th Street in downtown Billings.

The theatre opened February 22, 1913 with Roscoe Kernen at the organ. The following day the permanent house organist started, 18-year old Professor Charles Crawford. He later changed his name to Jesse.

The theatre building burned to the ground March 10, 1950. It was known as The Empire when the fire occurred. The pipe organ fortunately had been removed earlier. It was recently located by chapter president Steve Plaggemeyer, who was organist for a service in a Billings church and made the discovery.

The organ is now installed in the First Church of Christ Scientist located at 7 Burlington Avenue. The pipe work has been changed to electro-pneumatic action; however the old pneumatic tubes were left in place on the Kimball chests.

The instrument has a M. P. Möller two manual, rolltop console. The name plate reads: "Console By M. P. Möller, Hagerstown, Maryland 1948. Ranks are Bourdon, Clarabella, Dulciana, Flute d'Amour, Gamba, Stopped Diapason and Trumpet which was changed for Vox Humana.

STOP LIST

Pedal

16' Bourdon
Great to Swell
Swell to Pedal
Swell to Pedal 4'

Swell

8' Gamba
8' Stopped Diapason
4' Flute d'Amour
8' Vox Humana (Trumpet)
Tremolo
4' Swell Coupler

Great

8' Open Diapason
8' Clarabella
8' Dulciana
Great 4' Coupler
Swell to Great 16'
Swell to Great
Swell to Great 4'

May 18, 1913

GEM THEATER

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